



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB-1057: AN ACT CONCERNING THE
SECRETARY OF THE STATE AND EARLY VOTING,
SB-1064: AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EARLY VOTING,
AND HB-5004: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING EARLY VOTING; AND
SJ-29: RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE
STATE CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING,
HJ-1: RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE
CONSTITUTION TO ALLOW NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING, AND
HB-6693: AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING.

Government Administration and Elections Committee

February 22, 2023

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Flexer and Blumenthal, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, Vice Chairs Slap and Morrin Bello, and all other Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan, a resident of Stratford, and the co-chair of the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter's Education and Legislative Action Network (NASW/CT ELAN). I am testifying on behalf of the chapter which represents over 2,300 members supporting some of the voting bills before you today.

NASW/CT believes voting is an inalienable right and supports encouragement of voting by all eligible residents. Voting is also the most important civic duty of our state's residents. Participating in who will represent you at the local, state, and federal level is what makes this nation a democracy. And we believe the role of this committee is to acknowledge that voter choice is essential for higher participation and a fuller, more active democracy.

We have come before you in the past and said, "Any restrictions on this right to vote is unacceptable." Today, I start with a heartfelt thank you for your work in this committee and the General Assembly to protect and expand voting access for Connecticut residents. From the outside, the process to change our state Constitution appears laborious and frustratingly LONG and imagine your experience to be that... multiplied!

NASW/CT appreciates your collective leadership that brings us here today to discuss not only implementation of Early Voting but the continuation of the state constitution amendment for No-Excuse Absentee Voting.

Early Voting

In November, a strong 60% majority of our voters decided that Connecticut would finally join 46 other states and allow early voting. There should be no judgement leveled on an individual's inability to always, without fail, visit their polling location on Election Day. NASW/CT calls for implementation of early voting that enables the greatest access for all and will help reduce racial discriminatory practices that continue to this day.

We urge you consider passing legislation that designs and fully funds – staffing and public information campaigns – this system in advance of the 2023 municipal election cycle. A presidential election, upcoming in 2024, is too heavy a lift for our municipal employees and election volunteers. We call for a minimum of two weeks of Early Voting that includes all seven days with weekend and evening hours and same day registration during this period. This provides options for those with unpredictable, irregular, or simply, challenging, schedules.

Absentee Voting

Two years ago, the legislature moved closer to placing a statewide constitutional amendment about no-excuse absentee voting before the voters of Connecticut as a ballot question. NASW/CT supports passage of the resolutions so the voters can decide in 2024.

With complexities and uncertainties remaining in both the health and schedules of many of the voters in our state, and yet-imagined future public health threats that limit access for all, retaining the option of absentee voting is important to protecting the right to vote.

Connecticut has the most limited absentee ballot access of any state. Because not all voters meet the narrow reasons for acquiring an absentee ballot, every election eligible voter's find themselves unable to vote. That was before COVID-19. Circumstances have dramatically changed so what was not a defensible absentee ballot process in the past is now an anti-democratic process. As the goal of government is full participation in the process, no "excuse" is needed.

Finally, on improving the absentee ballot counting process, NASW/CT supports notification to voters whose absentee ballots may be rejected due to a defect so they can either correct the defect or vote in person.

In times of such polarization and division, these bills appear nonpartisan issues with high support. NASW/CT asks the committee to support ALL efforts that increase accessibility to voting, including early voting and no-excuse absentee voting.

With respect and gratitude for your service and consideration,

Kathleen Callahan
NASW/CT ELAN Co-Chair
Stratford, CT